WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An article of footwear comprising:

an upper;

an outsole defining a ground engaging surface;

a sole disposed between said upper and said outsole, said sole including an energy return system;

wherein said energy return system comprises a first rigid plate, a second rigid plate spaced a predetermined distance from said first rigid plate, and at least one separating element disposed therebetween to maintain the spacing between said plates.

2. The article of footwear of claim 1 wherein said first and second plates comprise a material having a modulus of elasticity of at least approximately 32 x 10^6 lb/in^2.

3. The article of footwear of claim 2 wherein said material comprises carbon graphite.

4. The article of footwear of claim 1 wherein said at least one separating element comprises an elastomeric material.

5. The article of footwear of claim 1 wherein said at least one separating element comprises two separating elements, a first one of said separating elements being disposed in a toe area of said article of footwear and a second one of said separating elements being disposed in a heel area of said article of footwear.

6. The article of footwear of claim 1 wherein said first one of said separating elements is generally arcuate.

7. The article of footwear of claim 1 wherein said first and second rigid plates define an energy return system.

8. An energy return system for use in a shoe sole, said system comprising:

a first rigid plate;

a second rigid plate spaced a predetermined distance from said first rigid plate;

at least one separating element maintaining the distance between said first and second rigid plates.

9. The energy return system of claim 8 wherein said first and second plates comprise a material having a modulus of elasticity of at least approximately 32 x 10^6 lb/in^2.

10. The energy system of claim 9 wherein said material comprises carbon graphite.

11. The energy system of claim 10 wherein said first and second plates are formed by a plurality of layers of carbon graphite.

12. The energy system of claim 8 wherein each of said first and second rigid plates extends substantially the entire length of a foot.

13. The energy system of claim 12 wherein each of said first and second rigid plates is configured to include a rocker bottom.

14. The energy system of claim 8 wherein each of said first and second rigid plates extends only a portion of the length of a foot.

15. The energy system of claim 14 wherein each of said first and second rigid plates extends from a toe area of the foot to an arch area of the foot.

16. The energy system of claim 8 wherein said at least one separating element comprises an elastomeric material.

17. The energy system of claim 8 wherein said at least one separating element comprises two separating elements, a first one of said separating elements disposed in a forward end of the energy return system and a second one of said separating elements disposed in a rearward end of the energy return system.

18. A shoe sole incorporating the energy return system of claim 8.

19. An article of footwear incorporating the shoe sole of claim 16.

20. A shoe sole for an article of footwear comprising:

an outsole defining a ground engaging surface;

an upper rigid plate spaced from the outsole for attachment to an upper;

a lower rigid plate disposed between the outsole and the upper rigid plate; and

at least one separating element disposed between the upper and lower rigid plates to maintain the separation thereof.

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